



[Home](#) » [News](#) » [Psychology News](#) » Video Games (in Moderation) May Help Teens

Video Games (in Moderation) May Help Teens

By PSYCH CENTRAL NEWS EDITOR
Reviewed by John M. Grohol, Psy.D. on March 12, 2010

More conflicting data has emerged about the effects of video games on a child's development. Spanish researchers found in a study of young teens that video games can have a positive effect in a child's educational development and academic performance, when used in moderation.

The new study investigated whether attitudes of users toward video games and how they use them have a significant impact on certain cognitive tasks. The researchers specifically targeted brain skills in spatial intelligence, self-efficacy and academic performance.

Spanish researcher Llorca Díez looked at 266 participants ages 11 and 16. All children were given a semi-structured interview, a survey of use and preferences in video games, two intelligence tests and an inventory of self-efficacy. Parents filled out a survey on opinions, knowledge and attitudes toward video games.

Results revealed that boys not only play more than girls, but they start earlier, an outcome that could be related to a clearly cultural influence.

The researchers also found that as kids play more often, they do it for longer periods of time, which in the opinion of Llorca Díez "confirms the concern of some researchers about the possibility that some video games are addicting."

There are also gender differences not only in the use that young people make of video games, but also in what they demand of them. Thus, boys are more stringent than girls, and prefer realistic, challenging, impressive and competitive games. They also like games with a very elaborate plot, containing a high level of artificial intelligence and with quite sophisticated graphic and sound elements.

More than half of parents have an unfavorable opinion about games, but, nevertheless, continue to acquire this type of entertainment for their children. Furthermore, they often do not take protection criteria into consideration at the time of purchase.

Regarding the variable of academic performance, the researcher points out that "it is not only affected by the use of video games, but also hours of study and self-efficacy perception have demonstrated predictors of school success." There are more chances that students will obtain high grades if they believe in their own ability, and the learning process did not produce [anxiety](#).

Other conclusions emerging from this research reveal that almost a third of teens play only on weekends, and, in fact, as the author of this work points out, "very few kids play every day, an encouraging result that indicates a certain degree of control."

Over 40% of children play between one and two hours "each time they play" (not on a daily or weekly basis) and only 7% of them play more than three hours. Boys not only play more often, but when they do play, they do it for longer periods of time. Finally, young people prefer "non-sports strategy" games, followed by sports and the so-called "platform" games.

About 40% of respondents have problems arising from the use of video games (usually two or three problems at once). Nevertheless, the highest percentage of problems arises from the fact that "someone tells him that he plays too much" followed by "discussions with parents." It is noteworthy that a significant number of the participants admitted sleeping less and not doing well at school work.

Yet Ángeles Llorca thinks that video games can represent "a very useful pedagogical

tool” to encourage self-efficacy, a variable that improves academic performance. Therefore, it is necessary to encourage parents, teachers and advisers to get acquainted with this type of entertainment technology, which they should consider as part of visual communication. Likewise, motivation of children to play video games should be used as a pedagogical tool in the field of education.

The UGR researcher considers “essential” a dissemination of new technologies among educators and parents. They should acknowledge “the reality of children in this field, its use and enjoyment, in order to make the most of these games, and, at the same time, protect them from possible abuses and dangers.”

The research was conducted by Ángeles Llorca Díez from the Department of Didactics of Musical, Plastic and Corporal Expression at the University of Granada, and directed by professors M^a Dolores Álvarez Rodríguez (University of Granada) and M^a Ángeles Díez Sánchez (University of Salamanca).

Source: University of Granada

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